



Older Adults

Live Stronger, Longer!

Public health advancements and new treatment options are enabling Americans to live longer lives.

- In 2000, there were 35 million adults 65 and older in the United States – approximately 12 percent of the total population.¹
- By 2030, the population of older adults will rise to 70 million, more than 20 percent of the total population.²

But living longer doesn't mean Americans are living stronger.

- Eighty percent of older adults suffer from at least one chronic condition, and the average 75-year-old has three chronic conditions and uses five prescription drugs.³
- Chronic conditions account for almost 95 percent of health care expenditures among older adults.⁴

Older adults can PREVENT many common health problems.

- Nearly 40,000 older Americans die each year from influenza or pneumonia, even though the risk of getting these diseases can be lessened significantly with immunizations.⁵
- Simple measures such as doing balance exercises and removing hazards in the home can greatly reduce chances of falling. More than one-third of adults over age 65 fall each year, and of these about 30 percent suffer injuries that decrease mobility and

independence.⁶

- More than one in four older adults has heart disease and about half have hypertension. Both diseases can be prevented or controlled by eating a healthy diet and getting regular physical activity.⁷

Early detection can PROTECT the health of older adults.

- Many chronic diseases can be treated if they are detected in time, but only one-third of older adults receive all recommended screening measures.⁸
- Early detection of colorectal cancer through screening greatly increases chances of survival, yet over 40 percent of adults over age 65 have never had a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy.⁹

Even older adults with chronic conditions can PLAN to stay healthy.

- Older adults can live longer, healthier lives by visiting their doctor on a regular basis and creating an action plan to manage their conditions.
- Correctly following the treatment prescribed by a doctor makes it possible to manage many illnesses. Unfortunately, many people fail to do this. For example, nearly one in four older adults skips doses of medication or does not fill prescriptions because of cost, and suffers worse health as a result.¹⁰

1. "We the People: Aging in the United States," U.S. Census Bureau, December 2004.

2. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

3. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

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5. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

6. "Health Information for Older Adults," Centers for Disease Control, http://www.cdc.gov/aging/health_issues.htm

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8. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

9. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

10. "Seniors and Prescription Drugs," Kaiser Family Foundation, July 2002, <http://www.kff.org/medicare/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=14177>

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Live Stronger, Longer!

Immunizations

Older adults can reduce their risk of several lifethreatening diseases through immunizations. Vaccines are safe and effective, and are covered by Medicare. **Older adults can live stronger, longer by making sure their immunizations are up to date.**

Pneumonia

- In 1998, about 3,400 older adults died from invasive pneumococcal disease.¹
- Nearly half of older adults have never received the pneumonia vaccine.²
- Latinos and African Americans are less likely to have received the vaccine than Whites. More than 60 percent of older African-Americans and nearly 75 percent of older Latino adults have not been vaccinated.³

Influenza

- Ninety percent of the approximately 36,000 flu deaths each year in the 1990s were among older Americans.⁴
- In 2002, one-third of older adults did not get a flu shot.⁵
- Even when there are vaccine shortages, older adults are considered high risk and should still seek a flu shot.

Tetanus

- Adults age 50 years or older account for

70 percent of tetanus infections.⁶

- A recent study found two-thirds of older adults may lack adequate immunity to tetanus.⁷
- Adults over age 60 may have never received the primary series of tetanus and diphtheria shots because those vaccines were not routinely given to children until 1950.⁸

Immunization Recommendations

- **Pneumonia** – Older adults who have never had the pneumonia vaccine should be vaccinated. Talk to your doctor if you are unsure of whether you've had the shot.
- **Influenza** – Older adults should get a flu shot each year. Flu shots are available from your doctor, other community health providers and clinics held at grocery stores and pharmacies. Family members in close contact with older adults should also get a flu shot.
- **Tetanus** – All adults need a tetanus booster shot every 10 years. Talk to your doctor if you can't remember your last booster shot or aren't sure you ever had a tetanus vaccination.
- **Other Vaccines** – Some older adults may benefit from vaccines for chickenpox and hepatitis B. Ask your doctor about whether you are at risk for either disease.

1. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.
2. "Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Health and Well-Being," <http://www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2004/healthrisks.html#Indicator%2021>
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5. "Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Health and Well-Being," <http://www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2004/healthrisks.html#Indicator%2021>
6. "Adults Need Tetanus Shots, Too," Food and Drug Administration, http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/696_tet.html
7. University of Florida, <http://www.napa.ufl.edu/98news/tetanus.htm>
8. "Power of 10," National Foundation for Infectious Diseases, <http://www.nfid.org/powerof10/section2/areyouprotected.html>

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Healthy Lifestyle

Live Stronger, Longer!

By eating a healthy diet and being physically active, older adults can prevent or reverse the onset of several chronic conditions and lessen the risk of getting certain cancers. The prevalence of obesity among older adults increased from 12 percent in 1990 to 19 percent in 2002.¹

Older adults can live stronger, longer by following nutritional guidelines and incorporating physical activity into their daily lives.

Healthy Diet

- Over 80 percent of older adults have a diet that is poor or needs improvement.²
- Less than one-third of older adults eat five or more fruits and vegetables daily.³
- Older adults living in poverty are much less likely to eat a good diet than those who live above the poverty level.⁴

Physical Activity

- Nearly 80 percent of older adults do not engage in regular leisure-time physical activity.⁵
- Increasing physical activity among older adults could reduce direct medical costs by as much as \$77 billion annually.⁶

Recommendations for Eating a Healthy Diet⁷

- Eat at least two servings of fruit each day and at least three servings of vegetables, especially dark green, leafy vegetables like broccoli and kale and orange

vegetables like carrots and sweet potatoes.

- Drink three cups of milk, or an equivalent amount of low-fat yogurt or cheese, each day. These calcium-rich foods help to keep bones strong.
- Eat three servings of whole grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice and pasta each day. These foods are rich in fiber, which can reduce the risk of getting some diseases.
- Eat two to three servings of protein including fish, poultry, beans, nuts and eggs each day. Lean sources of protein contains less saturated fat, which can lead to heart disease.

Recommendations for Physical Activity

- Check with your doctor before increasing your physical activity level.
- Start with as little as five or 10 minutes of physical activity a day, and gradually work up to 30 minutes most days of the week.⁸ Moderate activities, such as daily walking or gardening, make a big difference in your overall health.
- Strength exercises such as lifting weights improve muscle mass and can decrease a woman's risk of getting osteoporosis. Stretching exercises can maintain freedom of movement and flexibility. Balance exercises can prevent falls. Visit <http://nihseniorhealth.gov/exercise/toc.html> for examples of exercises for older adults.

1. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

2. "Older Americans 2004: Key Indicators of Health and Well-Being," <http://www.agingstats.gov/chartbook2004/healthrisks.html#Indicator%2023>

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6. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

7. "Healthy Eating & Physical Activity Across Your Lifespan," Weight-control Information Network, October 2002.

8. "Promoting Active Lifestyles Among Older Adults," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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Live Stronger, Longer!

Injury Prevention

Falls are the leading cause of death due to injury among people 65 and older.⁶⁰ Even when they are not life-threatening, injuries due to falls can cause a devastating loss of mobility and independence. **Older adults can live stronger, longer by taking steps to reduce the risk of falling.**

Facts About Falls

- More than one-third of adults over age 65 fall each year, and of these about 30 percent suffer injuries that decrease mobility and independence.⁶¹
- Factors that increase the risk of falling include side effects from medications, overall decreases in strength and balance, and hazards in the home.
- Fractures are among the most serious health consequences of falls.⁶² Hip fractures are especially serious, as up to one-quarter of hip fracture patients die within one year. Rates of hip fracture hospitalizations for older women are two times higher than for older men.⁶³
- Fall-related injuries among older people cost the nation more than \$20 billion each year. By 2020, the total annual cost of these injuries is expected to reach \$32.4 billion.⁶⁴
- Fear of falling is a major factor that causes older adults to limit or avoid physical activity.⁶⁵

Recommendations to Improve Balance

- Certain medications have side effects such as dizziness that can increase the risk of falling. Older adults should review their medications with their doctor if they

experience dizziness or other side effects that affect their balance.⁶⁶

- Older adults who are not physically active or who have certain conditions such as Parkinson's disease may find it difficult to maintain their balance. Moderate activity such as walking and special balance exercises can reduce the risk of falling by improving strength and stability.⁶⁷
- Older adults who are experiencing balance problems should talk to their doctors. Health professionals can perform simple gait and balance tests covered by Medicare. Annual vision screening can identify correctable vision problems that increase the risk of falling.

Recommendations to Eliminate Home Hazards⁶⁸

- Ensure that all areas of the home, especially hallways and stairways, are well lit.
- Install handrails on both sides of stairways and attach safety treads to steps.
- Remove tripping hazards such as throw rugs, furniture and clutter from walkways.
- Use self-adhesive, non-skid mats or safety treads in bathtubs, showers and pools.
- Install grab bars on both sides of toilets and bathtubs.
- Use non-skid rugs in bathrooms and non-skid mats under rugs on bare floors elsewhere in the house.

1. "National Health Interview Survey, 2001-2002," National Center for Health Statistics.

2. "Health Information for Older Adults," Centers for Disease Control, http://www.cdc.gov/aging/health_issues.htm

3. "Health Information for Older Adults," Centers for Disease Control, http://www.cdc.gov/aging/health_issues.htm

4. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

5. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

6. "Understanding Aging: Biology, Behavior and Environment," Public Health, University of California, Berkeley.

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Live Stronger, Longer!

Prescription Medications

When appropriately prescribed, administered and monitored, medications are a cost-effective way to help older adults maintain health, recover from illness or control symptoms of chronic disease.¹

Older adults can live stronger, longer by carefully following their doctor's and pharmacist's instructions regarding medications.

Medication Use by Older Adults

- People age 65 and older make up 12 percent of the U.S. population, but account for 34 percent of all prescription medication use and 30 percent of all over-the-counter medication use.²
- Because older adults often take numerous medications prescribed by multiple health care providers, their risk of having an adverse reaction is greater than that of younger adults.³
- Among older adults, adverse reactions due to medication can be very serious, including falls, depression, confusion, hallucinations and malnutrition.⁴

Barriers to Proper Medication Use

- Nearly one in four older adults skips doses of medication or does not fill prescriptions because of cost.⁵
- Memory impairment and sensory changes such as vision loss that often occur among older adults can create challenges for correctly adhering to complex medication regimens.⁶

Consequences of Improper Use

- According to researchers, about 60

percent of older adults take their prescriptions improperly, and approximately 140,000 die each year as a result.⁷

- Research shows that older adults who fail to take prescribed medications were 76 percent more likely to experience a significant decline in their overall health than those who took all medications as prescribed.⁸

Recommendations for Using Medications Safely

- Listen carefully when your doctor prescribes medication, and ask questions to find out the name of the drug, its purpose, and any potential side effects. Ask a family member to accompany you to a doctor's visit to help take notes about medication regimens.
- Always follow your doctor's instructions, as well as any instructions printed on the medication's label, very closely. Be sure to pay attention to how often a medication should be taken and if it can or should be taken with food. Do not stop taking your prescribed medicines even if you feel better, unless told to do so by your doctor.
- Once a year, make a "brown bag" visit to your primary care doctor's office. Bring all your medications, both prescription and over-the-counter. Your doctor can help you weed out any expired medications and make sure that all of your medications are compatible.
- Try to fill all of your prescriptions at the same pharmacy so that the pharmacist can check for drug interactions.

1. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

2. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

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Live Stronger, Longer!

Health Screenings

Only one in three older adults is getting all recommended health screening measures.¹ **Older adults can live stronger, longer by making sure they get all health screenings on the schedule recommended by their doctor.**

Cancer Screenings

- Colorectal cancer is the second-leading cause of death in the United States. Early detection greatly improves chances of survival, yet over 40 percent of older adults have never had a colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy.²
- Timely mammography screening among women older than 50 could prevent at least 17 percent of all breast cancer deaths, but more than one in five women over age 65 has not had a mammogram within the past two years.³
- Prostate cancer is the second-leading use of cancer death among men, but can be treated if detected early.⁴ Almost 30 percent of older men have not had a recent prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test and over 40 percent have not had a recent digital rectal exam.⁵

Other Screenings

- High blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke, is the most common chronic condition among older adults.⁶
- Because high blood pressure does not have any noticeable symptoms, regular blood pressure screenings are critical.
- More than 20 million Americans between the ages of 40 and 74 have higher than

normal blood glucose levels, a condition called "pre-diabetes." If detected early, lifestyle changes can prevent the onset of diabetes.

- Glaucoma – a serious vision condition that can lead to blindness – is treatable if detected during routine vision screenings.⁷ Other vision problems that can cause falls are easily corrected if detected during an annual screening.
- An estimated 34 million older adults have low bone mass, placing them at an increased risk of developing osteoporosis.⁸ If diagnosed early, osteoporosis can be treated with new drugs that help strengthen bones before life-threatening fractures occur.⁹

Recommended Screening Schedule¹⁰

- **Colon Cancer** – Colonoscopy every 10 years or a flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years.
- **Breast Cancer** – Yearly mammogram and clinical breast exam for women over age 65.
- **Prostate Cancer** – Annual PSA tests and digital rectal exams for men over age 50 with a life expectancy of at least 10 years.
- **Diabetes** – Annual glucose test.
- **Blood Pressure** – Blood pressure test at every medical exam, at least every one to two years.
- **Vision** – Annual vision screening.
- **Osteoporosis** – Women over age 65 should be tested at least once for osteoporosis.

1. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

2. "The State of Health and Aging in America 2004," Merck Institute of Aging and Health and Centers for Disease Control, 2004.

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